

★ news release

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FEATURE MATERIAL

AMERICAN CONSUMPTION OF SHRIMP AT RECORD HIGH

The Department's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries reports that in the first six months of 1964 sales of fresh and frozen shrimp were up 22 percent over the comparable period a year ago. Through August 1964, sales were still 18 percent above the first eight months of 1963.

There appears to be no single answer to why Americans are eating more shrimp on a per capita basis, but rising consumer purchasing power, growing consumer preference, development of new products, wider distribution, improvement in quality, and increased product promotion have all been contributing factors.

Sales of frozen breaded shrimp products have experienced a rapid growth since 1950, with new records being set each year. Sharp gains also have been registered by frozen, peeled, de-veined shrimp. Sales of fresh or frozen headless shrimp also have been increasing and shrimp in this form still holds the largest share of the market.

Economists know that consumption of high-valued foods, such as shrimp, is gaining as disposable personal income increases, a significant trend that promises well for shrimp and supports expectations of increased consumption as the trend continues.

The domestic shrimp industry is primarily in the Gulf States. The United States also imports large quantities of shrimp. Mexico has been the principal source of such seafood, with India and Latin American countries supplying increasing quantities in recent years.

Shrimp prices generally, during the first eight months of this year, have been below the comparable months of 1963, but August prices were just about equal to the five-year 1959-63 average for that month, the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries said.

Shrimp in cold storage on September 1 was above the 1959-63 average, but the Bureau reports it was not large in relation to current consumption. Domestic shrimp landings generally are down in 1964, but imports for the first eight months were slightly higher. Record cold-storage stocks at the beginning of 1964 contributed to the large supply available for consumption in the early months of this year.

The Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, part of the Fish and Wildlife Service, conducts extensive research into increasing the shrimp population, finding new shrimping areas, and developing new and better gear with which to catch shrimp.

Donald L. McKernan, Bureau Director, said that historically the United States shrimp fishery has been a night-time operation. This is because shrimp burrow into the bottom sediment during daylight hours to avoid predators and consequently are not available for capture by trawl nets. He said research by the Bureau has resulted in the application of low-voltage electricity to the trawls. This technique stimulates shrimp from their burrows up into the water where they are captured by the trawl. The method permits day and night fishing which results in more efficient utilization of vessel and personnel. The low energy levels used have no harmful effect on shrimp or associated organisms.

Bureau scientists also are continuing research into the distribution, growth, survival, and abundance of shrimp. One goal is the development of culture methods for rearing shrimp from the egg to post-larval stages under semi-natural conditions.

In recent years, the Bureau has encouraged operators of larger and more powerful vessels to fish farther off shore where new shrimp resources have been discovered by Bureau exploratory vessels. At the same time, improved packing and freezing techniques have extended the market area for shrimp, further aiding stability and economic growth in the industry.

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